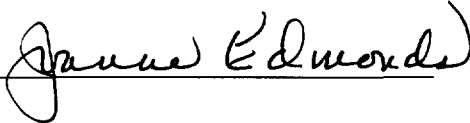


Study of Methodist Worship

Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joanne Edmonds", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and includes a large loop at the end of the last name.

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Abstract:

The "Study of Methodist Worship" consists of a word study of "worship", a history of Methodism, a gathering of others' reactions to worship, and a personal history and conclusions. While the first three portions largely involved reporting research results, the last was intended to offer opinions based on those results. The ideological emphasis was on showing the validity of both traditional and contemporary worship, while offering informed comments on both.

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- My great thanks to Dr. Joanne Edmonds, my advisor for this project, without whose willingness and support it would not have been possible.

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Introduction

Worship includes not only actions but attitudes, which we might call actions of the heart. Though the *New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* defines worship as “the expression in corporate gatherings of adoration, praise and thanksgiving to God in response to his activity in the world,” and though this project focuses on much the same topic, i.e. worship within the church ceremony, I must take issue with their wording (Davies vii). To say it is “the expression in corporate gatherings” implies that the action is taken by the church body as a whole, and seems to debase the experience of worship for the individual who is a part of that body. However, I agree wholly with the *New Westminster* definition of worship as “expression . . . of adoration, praise and thanksgiving to God in response to his activity in the world.” In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb “worship” is defined for current use as “1. to honour or revere as a supernatural being or power, or as a holy thing; to regard or approach with veneration; to adore with appropriate acts, rites, or ceremonies” and “2. to regard with extreme respect or devotion; to ‘adore’.” Clearly worship is emphasized here as an attitude, much more even than an action, as the way we “regard” God, not only the actions we take in relation to him, which are guided by the way we regard him. Worship, in the *OED* second definition, fits with the common stance of the modern evangelical Christian that worship can be a “twenty-four/seven” event, i.e., that anything we do can be worship, if we have the right mindset in doing it. I propose that here we define worship as “1. a state of mind of reverence and respect toward God; 2. any and every act undertaken to express reverence and respect toward God.” Though my definition is broad enough to include

worship in any setting and on any day, I will only address worship as it pertains to the regular Sunday ceremonies of the United Methodist Church in America.

There are many potential parts to a weekly worship service, but not all churches include all possibilities. Therefore, I will address three main acts of worship found virtually universally in the tradition at hand: song, prayer, and sermon. The status of a sermon as an act of worship can be questioned, however. It is obviously a part of what we call a worship service, but is not always seen as an act of worship in and of itself. It is worship, however, in that worship is to bow down to another, to acknowledge the superiority of another. Are we not doing just that when we sit to learn about God and how He affects our lives? Worship has also come to be known commonly today as an act of drawing near to God. In this sense also, hearing a sermon is an act of worship, because we draw nearer to God by making a decided effort to learn more about Him.

This exploration has stemmed from intense personal interest in modern worship. I attended the same Christian church from childhood until I left home for college. Since then, I have been to many different kinds of Christian churches and have discovered the wide variety of worship practices that exist today. This variety can be considered a great blessing or a great source of confusion and conflict for the modern Christian like myself. We struggle to find churches that do what is right according to the Scriptures, that make us feel welcome, that make us feel close to God. In my working definition of the “modern Christian” I wish to include anyone who desires an appropriate Biblical form of worship in the churches offered to us today.

Word Study

“O come, let us sing to the LORD;
 let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
 let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God,
 and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth;
 the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
 and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

O come, let us worship and bow down,
 let us kneel before the LORD our maker!
For he is our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture,
 and the sheep of his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice!
 Do not harden your hearts . . .”

In a search to understand worship, our first source must be the Bible, the message from God to the people who worship him. Psalm 95 above (vss. 1-8a, NRSV), offers a good overview of Biblical worship. The psalm describes both acts and attitudes of worship, offers reasons why we should worship, and is itself currently used in Christian worship services. This use varies from liturgical chants, to hymns, to modern worship songs.

The Hebrew word that is above translated as “worship” is transliterated as “shachah”. It can also be translated as, “crouch,” “make to stoop,” “do/make obeisance,” “do reverence,” “fall down,” “fall flat,” “humbly beseech,” and several variants of “bow down,” (*Young’s*). The most prolific entry by far in the concordance is “worship,” used 99 times, with “bow down” as the translation about one third as many times. The other

options are used five or fewer times each. (It is interesting to note that in the Psalms, “shachah” is always translated as “worship.”) In creating a definition of “worship” based on all these alternatives, it is clear that the most important concept is that of lowering oneself, presumably with the purpose of raising another up, or emphasizing the height of another. One’s posture in worship is important. It is hardly surprising that some faith traditions still regularly incorporate actual physical bowing and kneeling into their services.

Therefore, all through the Old Testament the physical acts demanded in Levitical Law had been necessary, though many prophets emphasized that the spiritual attitude of the worshiper must match his or her physical actions, otherwise they were useless. However, the concept of posture can be developed further, stemming from these exclusively Old Testament references, in the same way most aspects of our relationship to God were developed during New Testament years. In the New Testament, the inner attitude of the worshiper was emphasized more than the outer posture.

Psalm 95 contains suggestions of both acts and attitudes of worship, and how they converge. In exploring the passage from Psalm 95, above, certain exhortations define the worship experience, phrased in this translation as “let us . . .” We are encouraged to sing, to show joy, to enter the presence of God, to show thanks, to praise, to bow and kneel, to listen, and that with open hearts. Most of these commands offer instruction to the attitude much more than to the physical body. It is important to note the structure of the verse, which is similar to that of many psalms: there is one line which offers a statement, command, or exhortation, followed by a second indented line which gives further explanation, details, or an expansion of, or restatement of, the first line. In this

structure, the meaning of the second line can be in a sense equated with that of the first; it is often a more specific statement of the same sentiment.

Interpreting Psalm 95 with this in mind, we get a detailed picture of what God intends for our worship. In verse 1, we are first exhorted to sing to our Lord, then to sing joyfully to “the rock of our salvation.” This restatement not only specifies the attitude with which we should sing, but gives a more descriptive name for God, which offers a reason to sing to Him and to be joyful, specifically that God is our steadfast savior. Verse 6 uses this same structure, asking us to bow down, then reminding us that the one we bow before is our maker. Verses 7d and 8a also function this way, asking us to listen, then showing that we must not only consider God’s word with our intellect, but take the words into our hearts too. (The remainder of verse 8 and the rest of the psalm give an example of a time when the Hebrews did not take the message given them to heart, and the hardship that followed.) Verse 2 tells us to be thankful, to enter God’s presence, then explains how to express our thanks when we are before him, by showing our joy through songs of praise. Three states first that God is a great God, then explains that he is not just great, but in fact superior to all others. Verses 4 and 5 build continuously on each other, showing God as in control of first one extreme of nature, then the opposite, then saying the same about two more opposites, but adding the knowledge that God not only controls them but created them. That He is the creator offers validation for his control. Seven begins with a simple statement that God is *our* God, then explains the dynamics of that relationship further in likening us to sheep with a shepherd who not only leads us but holds us in his hand. In fact the psalm offers a sequence of commands or exhortations alternated with reasons for following them. Several examples of this structure as used

within one verse have been noted above, but larger combinations are also present. The third, fourth, and fifth verses act together as a reason to act on the first and second; we ought to sing with joy, thanks, and praise because God is so powerful. Verses 6 and 7 echo this structure, but with a different tone, saying that we ought to bow and kneel to the God who cares for and protects us. The rest of the psalm, from 7d to the end, is another such structure, showing the folly of failing to listen to the God who so clearly proved himself in the example given.

In the New Testament, however, the laws were transmuted into instructions on how to approach God spiritually, with the physical requirements in them largely removed. For instance, it was no longer necessary to make actual animal sacrifices; instead, New Testament authors spoke of “spiritual sacrifices.” *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* defines worship as “the attitude and acts of reverence to a deity.” In both Old and New Testament traditions, as well as today, both acts and attitudes are important. In the Old Testament, lists of laws regarding man’s relationship with God are long and detailed. In the new relationship between believers and our God as explained in the New Testament, things are very different. According to Susan Rattray’s entry on worship in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, “only three rituals are known from the New Testament: baptism, communion, and the laying on of hands. However, for none of these do we have any explicit instructions describing how they are to be performed,” (1146).

The physical rituals that many had believed to be of greatest importance were removed, revealing the true importance of the internal features. The New Testament concept of following the Old Testament rituals in attitude alone continues for a great majority of modern Christians. (A very few sects are in exception, following various Old

Testament rituals today.) In contemporary worship settings there are also indications of what is almost a reversal of the change away from physical actions. Many modern Christians use voluntary, individual postures during their worship that reflect their inner attitudes. These include lifting of hands, kneeling, and bowing. Although the enforcing of physical acts or postures in order to train or guide the attitude was used through extensive ritual in Old Testament times and is used today in very traditional services by postures or minor symbolic actions, the voluntary postures of many contemporary Christians allow the attitude to determine and guide the action.

So what does all this mean to the modern Christian? How are we to bow down mentally, spiritually? How are we to show our thanks to the Creator God? How are we to respond to his clear call to worship?

A Methodist Worship History

Introduction:

One can learn a good deal about the different kinds of worship used over time by the United Methodist church simply by attending the various kinds of services offered today. The range from “high church” traditional services to informal yet traditional ones to rollicking contemporary worship, all offered today, includes many of the practices that make up the historical progression of Methodism. As shown by Dr. Julia Corbett in her *Religion in America*, “Methodists’ patterns of worship vary widely. There is no required form of worship, although the *Book of Worship* gives suggested forms for Sunday services . . . Local congregations make use of it and modify it as they adapt it to their particular needs,” (64). From the years when Methodism was first solidifying and sifting itself out from the Anglican and Dissenting traditions, there hasn’t been any required set liturgy, and though there is often a suggested one, individual churches don’t seem to have had much compunction over diverting from it.

For this reason, among others, it is difficult to compile a history of worship, as much of what was done in Sunday services varied widely and was not documented. Much can be learned about the beginnings of Methodism, due to the high level of interest in the lives of the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, and the history of the denomination itself implies much about the history of its worship practices.

John Wesley (1703-1791), had strong roots in both the Anglican and Dissenting churches of eighteenth century England. He also visited churches in America and others in Europe, namely the Moravian (Brethren) church headquarters and their Society

meetings. Each tradition had its effect on Wesley who became the unintentional leader of a new denomination.

Predecessors of Methodism:

John Wesley maintained his loyalty to the Anglican Church until his death, despite being known as the leader of what became the separate Methodist denomination. The established church had great appeal to him, according to John Knox, who said that “his taste for decorum and dignity in ritual and ceremony, as his type of piety, was characteristically Anglican,” (Davies 188). In Wesley’s day, however, the Anglican Church was not holding the spiritual attention of many of its parishioners. One possible reason that the church might have been lax in fulfilling the needs of the people was inherent in the social climate of the early eighteenth century. James Nichols claims that “the wars of the seventeenth century . . . had left their usual legacy of spiritual and moral exhaustion” which left the church apparently without the energy within itself to provide for the parishioners (111). Anglican services were designed around the coming together of all the people of England, each in his or her own parish, to praise God in response for His works and care (Davies 32). One was expected to come to church ready to praise based on experiences in life. The Sunday services were dignified, formal ceremonies in which the layperson observed more than he participated physically, though he was thought to participate spiritually.

The typical sermon was a fifteen-minute, emotionless “dose of morality” (Davies 143). It was likely thought that this brief message was all that the congregation would

manage to pay attention to. Another scholar implies a lack of spiritual authenticity in the sermons, saying the church “had lapsed to preaching mere ethics,” (Nichols, 122).

Choirs still sang the praises of the church on behalf of the people, in complicated polyphonic anthems and Psalm settings (Davies 33). The choirs were often made up of young boys who were not necessarily cognizant of the import of their words. It was important to the Anglicans, however, that the praises offered were as beautiful and skillful as possible. The organ was used for other music, some of which was quite virtuosic.

“Forms of prayer” were used, which were set written prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer*, many of which were used in a repetitive fashion, week after week. These repeated prayers were seen as more effective than ones heard once only, as the hearer might learn the message more completely (Davies 27). For the most part, these were read by the priest on behalf of the people. Prayers had to be prepared ahead of time, and universal prayers used, in order that the prayers of the local church would reflect those of the Church as a whole, and that one would carefully consider the words he or she presented before God (Davies 26).

Among their preferences of practice, Anglican churches were not very suited to evangelical pursuits or “revivalism”, the arousal of new enthusiasm of those who were formerly churched but had drifted away, perhaps because anyone who was a geographic inhabitant of the parish was automatically considered a part of the church. In the Anglican system, one didn’t need to go “recruit” people to the church; all citizens knew the state church was there if they chose to come. Despite their political origins and status as the national church, the Anglican Church professed itself to be descended from the

Apostles in an unbroken line (through Roman Catholicism). Their worship was intended to follow the tradition of the Church Fathers (Davies 19). (Anglican practice was also centered largely around the sacraments, particularly communion. Wesley was very concerned about the regular administration of communion, wishing it to remain part of the Anglican service, from which he did not intend his Methodists to separate. As communion is not a central feature of the *weekly* rituals of many modern churches, it must unfortunately be left out of consideration here.)

The Puritan tradition, though officially not separate from the Anglican Church in Wesley's time, was a movement for change within it. The Puritans, later Congregationalists, were part of the group that became the Dissenters in the eighteenth century, also known as Non-conformists. John Wesley's parents were Puritan Anglicans. While the Anglicans sought to emulate the Early Church Fathers, Dissenters sought authentically Biblical worship (Davies 20). They were also against the idea of a national church, believing the members of the church are to be determined according to faith, not geographical/political status. Their worship differed from the Anglican establishment in numerous ways.

Dissenters disapproved of complicated vocal music in worship because it necessitated a choir. In their view, the congregation has the right to sing its own praise and ought to (Davies 33). In fitting the songs of worship for the congregation, several steps were taken. First the Psalms were set to simple metered music, then paraphrased for easier singing. Then Isaac Watts made the dramatic transition from using only psalms in church worship to including hymns (Davies 34). Hymns had a number of purposes and intentions; they acted as sung creeds (statements of faith) for the Non-conformists,

they were to act as a response to the Word of God heard in the readings and sermon, and they served a pedagogical function. Hymns had been written before Watts brought them into the church, but they were meant to be used outside the church, in the informal gatherings of believers (Nichols 125).

Though the congregation was to sing with its own mouth in psalms and hymns, it was still appropriate for the minister to serve as the mouth of the church in prayer (Davies 33). However, each minister was not required to simply act as a mouthpiece for the set prayers of the Church as a whole, but were encouraged to use instead free prayer, composed by the minister, not read from a manuscript, which was sometimes extemporary, or spontaneous. The Puritans had certain objections to set prayer: “a constant use of a set form deprived men of the capacity of simple prayer to their Creator . . . a prayer book lacked intimacy and particularity . . . to insist upon a prayer book was to equate human decisions with divine imperatives . . . if familiarity does not breed contempt, it may easily lead to the simulation of feelings not felt,” (Davies 28). Free prayer did make the assumption that a pastor knows his congregation, that the “shepherd” knows his “sheep”, and knows better than a universal book how to speak to and about them. Presumably this assumption was considered a positive one by the Puritans. Watts was a supporter of free prayer for its flexibility, and said “it is not possible that forms of prayer should be composed, that are perfectly suited to all our occasions in the things of this life and the life to come,” (Davies 27).

The Puritans believed the sermon was the primary means of distributing grace to the people, and thus gave it greater prominence than the Anglicans (Davies 31). Non-conformist sermons were a great deal longer than Anglican ones. Another reason for

their length was the different impetus of the Non-conformist worship service. Their services also sought for worship to come as a response to God's goodness, but felt that the service itself should offer evidence of that goodness, rather than simply an opportunity to respond to it (Davies 32). Non-conformists felt that their worship should be offered as a natural response to the sermons and readings, which were vehicles of revelation from God. Worship was not the initiating impulse, the congregation did not necessarily come ready to worship, but it was their natural reaction after hearing the Word of God read and preached. The Dissenters believed in the value of extemporary sermons as well as extemporary prayer, in which a pastor did not read his sermon verbatim from a script, and sometimes did not even have one prepared, but spoke as inspired in the moment.

The third major influence on John Wesley as he began to shape the group that became the Methodists was the Moravian tradition, entirely separate from the Anglican Church. He encountered them both in England and America, and it was at a Moravian Society meeting in London that he had his conversion experience. The Moravian emphasis in worship was on the personal side of Christianity, though in their lifestyle they by no means ignored the importance of community. It is not surprising that their style of worship had a great effect on Wesley the high churchman, but it is almost surprising that he accepted it willingly. Their groups looked at worship as "emotional, imaginative, sensuous, with a minimum of intellectual structure," which must have been jarring to the Oxford-educated Anglican (Nichols 122). However, Wesley found himself intrigued by their emotion and their music. Moravians used hymns in their worship, and in much of life as well, surrounding themselves with "almost continuous music" where

“even the night watchmen marked the hours, not with ‘All’s well’ but with hymn verses,” (Nichols 123). As they were a monastic community, setting themselves apart from the secular world at all times, consideration of their worship practices cannot be restrained to their Sabbath days. Though sermons were preempted by hymns in Moravian worship, prayers were still emphasized, and in fact, “an hourly intercession was maintained around the clock, for over a century,” (Nichols 124).

Birth of Methodism:

John Wesley felt that the route to an appropriate and beneficial worship practice was in bridging the gaps between the formality of Anglicanism, the spiritual authenticity of Puritanism, and the emotion of Moravianism (Davies 29). He saw advantages in both the use of liturgy and free prayer, and used various practices from throughout the history of Christianity to combine them satisfactorily. Since his Society meetings were meant to supplement, not replace, the Anglican services, he mainly explored the practices of the Puritans and Moravians, though always through his own inclination toward dignity. Early Methodists believed churchgoing was to be marked by the intention and emotion of the participant, and by the solemnity of the minister, “as becomes him who is transacting so high an affair between God and man,” (Davies 196). The main features that distinguished Methodist worship from its official roots in Anglicanism were the use of hymns and extemporary prayer (Nichols 127).

In Methodist meetings, hymns were used because they were considered beneficial to the gathered believers in the areas of devotion, faith, hope, and love. Like other Dissenters, they saw them as lyrical expressions of their beliefs and doctrine (Davies

201). Wesley felt it was good for the entire congregation to stand during the hymns, to sing with feeling, to sing in time and harmony with the others, and above all to “aim at pleasing God,” (Davies 201). Most of these admonitions still seem to echo the Anglican view of musical worship, that the quality was highly important. One pities the poor worshiper in Wesley’s congregation who was tone-deaf or rhythmically challenged. Wesley was also concerned with the new hymns expressing greater emotion, that the worshipers would get caught up in their feelings and forget to be always giving their hearts to God (Davies 201). During his lifetime, instruments were rarely used in Methodist services, but organs were commonly installed after his death (Nichols 127, Davies 201).

John Wesley’s views on extemporary prayer changed greatly over his lifetime. In 1737, he was surprised and shocked to hear it used in a Presbyterian service, thinking that people ought to be more careful in their speech toward God himself. Later the same day, he seemed even more surprised to find himself praying extempore at a private meeting, as evidenced by his journal entry. By the next year, Wesley was using extemporary prayer in his Society meetings, which at that time were still otherwise quite formal, approving of it for its “simplicity and spontaneity.” Though there is some indication that he used it in regular worship services, even in 1784, he was still wary. He advised the Methodists in America to continue using the prayer book he’d written on Sundays, a short version of it on Wednesdays and Fridays, and to use extemporary prayer on other days (Davies 193-194). (As we will see later, however, the American Methodists generally took worship into their own hands, spurred on by Wesley’s ideologies rather than his specific instructions.)

There is little information available on early Methodist preaching other than that of John Wesley himself. His sermons were accounted as powerful and passionate, addressing the “practical doctrines of experimental religion which . . . require an inner verification of the heart,” (Davies 151). His sources were the Gospel and the Law as he defined them, as, respectively, the life of Christ and his teachings at the Sermon on the Mount (Davies 153). He was concerned about teaching his congregation the essentials, both the means of salvation and the lifestyle of thanks that would be most pleasing to God.

Development of Independent Methodism:

Though the father of Methodism never intended a separation from the Anglican Church, separation became inevitable for a number of reasons. In part, Wesley did his job too well, in establishing Methodist Societies and guiding them in how to serve their members. Because the Societies were evangelistic where Anglicans weren't, new members entered who had no prior ties to the established church. Utterly new to Christianity, they had no basis for understanding the formalized and often symbolic meaning of the Anglican worship practices (Davies 189). They did not feel at home in the Sunday morning services, but the Society members knew how to make them comfortable. They saw the sincerity of the Society where they could not even understand the Anglican service, which made the Anglicans look insincere indeed. Then there were the loyal Anglican Methodists who continued attending at their parish churches only to be scorned by the Anglican clergy (Davies 190). For those who wished to avoid this ill

treatment by choosing one tradition or the other, the open welcome of the Society was surely almost as strong an influence as it was for the new Christians.

Methodism began a more corporate and official break from Anglicanism in America. As Methodism began to form in England, English settlers continued moving to America and taking their religion with them. A number of factors show that Anglican worship became increasingly unacceptable in America. The shortage of ordained ministers made it difficult or impossible for people to attend regular services, rather itinerating preachers rode their circuits and any one town might be visited once every two weeks, on any given day of the week. Under this system, the sermon was the main feature of the service, sometimes the only feature. Lay leaders stepped in to fill some gaps, but services led by them were not recognized as official by the Anglican Church, and certainly were not likely to conform to all the rules of its liturgy (Adams 103).

Surely the decreased formality of other parts of life for the colonists in America led them to appreciate less formal worship as well. In 1784, Wesley sent a new prayerbook to America suggesting a "Sunday Service", which was only a revised edition of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, for which he held such great respect (Davies 188). Arriving some years after the Revolutionary War, this acknowledgment of the influence of the Church of England was not as welcome as Wesley might have expected. Any ties to the Anglican Church were by that time seen as counter-revolutionary and were politically unpopular. As American Methodism altered itself to fit the needs of its congregations, Francis Asbury became the central leader, almost as John Wesley had been in England. In 1789 Asbury began to officially lead the American Methodists away from Anglican worship, instead offering his own suggestions for services and liturgy

(Adams 105). Later, during the Second Awakening of the early 1800's, the evangelical and revivalist tendencies of American churches pulled them yet farther from Anglican inclinations, due to the aforementioned incompatibilities.

At an 1832 conference of Methodists in America, it became apparent that even Asbury's simple worship suggestions were not universally followed (Adams 105). The sermon continued to be the most significant aspect of the service, and in addition to Asbury, various leadership groups suggested various guidelines for filling the space on either side of it. It is suggested that the beginning of American Methodism without a universal liturgy created an environment of freedom that was impossible to overcome even years later (Norwood 229). Though the sermon was central to early American Methodists, they were known by others largely for their singing. It seems that John Wesley's desire that each member of the congregation would sing with feeling was fulfilled, as they were known as a "singing people" and sometimes the "shouting Methodists," (Norwood 231-232).

As time wore on and life in the new United States of America became "more settled," worship practices followed (Norwood 326). Liturgies were still not specified by a governing body, but the people naturally turned greater attention toward them and they became more universal (Norwood 327). There were several aspects of the denomination that led toward this increasing similarity. First was the concept of itinerant preachers, which in the early days of the settlers contributed to the difference between congregations. As life became more orderly, the itinerancy program changed to accommodate. Preachers were assigned to a single congregation for a period of years, usually three to five, rather than moving around every week (Norwood 364). Since the

preachers stayed for a time, there was more of a sense of continuity within the individual congregations. Yet since the preachers were still known to be temporary, attached to the Methodist Church as a whole not to the individual congregation, there was a strong sense of the connection of one congregation to the whole denomination (Langdale). Secondly, Methodists practiced quarterly leadership meetings at which a range of liturgies was experienced (Langdale). These offered an opportunity for congregations to learn from each other and share traditions. Finally, Methodists had a strong interest in education, establishing secondary schools, colleges, and later seminaries (Langdale). The seminaries offered both a chance for a normative educational experience for all pastors and for the study of other denominations' practices (Langdale, Norwood 327).

Once the trend toward a common liturgy had begun, Methodists took hold of the idea and in the late nineteenth century, they took steps which encouraged it. Hymns had always been highly regarded as expressions of the Methodist doctrine. The publication at this time of official widely distributed hymnals brought a sense of unity to the sung portion of the liturgy. The publication *Discipline*, which set forth regulations for the denomination as decided at conferences, put forth more and more elaborate liturgies toward the turn of the century (Norwood 327). There was some controversy surrounding the setting of rituals, however, and the *Methodist Quarterly Review* published a number of articles arguing the question back and forth. Thomas Neely pointed out that though the liturgical suggestions might be excellent, they were just that, suggestions, not requirements. C. M. Griffin cautioned the church against a return to Catholic practices and the theology which accompanies them (Norwood 327). These fears did not stop the progress of Methodism toward a common liturgy, and in 1905 the *Methodist Hymnal*

used throughout the U.S. included a psalter and a yearly plan for Scripture readings (Norwood 328).

As the liturgy moved forward, the sermon did likewise, retaining its position at the center of Methodist worship. As pressure rose on ministers to compose a greater variety of sermons, due to their remaining in the same congregation throughout the year, the seminaries provided training in sermon composition. Hymns also retained their historical importance.

Modern Methodists:

The denomination has not to this day been inclined to set forth a universal required liturgy. This has left United Methodism uniquely open to innovations in worship practices. Churches or individuals of other denominations wishing to explore contemporary options might have had to do so in a conspicuous addition to an already complete liturgy, or in additional services as Wesley's Societies did, or to take the bold step of separation. But United Methodists have had a freedom to explore what is best for their individual churches, following the intentions of their current and former leaders in spirit rather than in letter. It takes a great confidence in the individual pastors for a denomination to allow such freedom. Methodism has historically exhibited this confidence, however, beginning with the initiation of extemporary prayer by John Wesley, which required a pastor to know his "flock" well enough to express their joys and concerns authentically without the express guidance of a prayerbook. The lack of a required liturgy has also allowed congregations to remain traditional where they choose

to do so, without undue pressure from bishops or other national leaders to conform to modern trends where they are not desired or needed.

What are the contemporary trends? What traditional elements are still used today? It would be nearly impossible to list all the different practices of United Methodist congregations today. Some elements are common to many, however.

The quantitative changes are generally musical: we see rock bands leading worship instead of organs, and repetitive praise songs projected on screens instead of hymns read verse by verse from hymnals. With the new music comes a sense of freedom as well, to clap, to sway or raise one's hands, or even to dance. The new hymns have largely left off the strong sense of theology offered by Wesley and Watts and their ideological descendants. Instead they are charged by emotion, showing one image of the worshiper's personal relationship with God and expanding on it, repeating it. The individual focus is another major change in songs of worship. While the hymns of the Dissenters emphasized the worship of the congregation together, the Body of Christ, modern worship songs often focus on an individual response to God.

Sermons remain largely the same, a preacher speaks on the Word of God, but not always from a pulpit anymore. A lectern may be used, or one might just stand openly before the congregation. Another change is that traditionally sermons have been based on the Scripture reading from that week. Many churches today don't have a Scripture reading outside the sermon. The sermon consists of a passage that is read then expounded on, often with other verses or passages referred to for confirmation. Some pastors who use this system follow a pattern for the passages used, and some choose them according to the topic they wish to preach on. Still other pastors preach on a purely

topical basis, choosing a topic, then using not one passage but many short Scripture references.

Prayer remains in the church, but in contemporary services it is often brief, and in the large (2000+) congregations of some modern churches, it cannot hope to address the congregation's needs in a very personal sense. Most churches use some amount of prayer that is technically extemporaneous, though in the more traditional services the person leading it will have prepared the words ahead of time. Many traditional churches use forms of prayer in addition to extempore, that are often printed in the order of worship. Some of the forms are read by the pastor, and some by the congregation. One set prayer is still common to both traditional and contemporary services: the Lord's Prayer. The idea of liturgy is fading from contemporary churches. Instead of needing a printed order or worship showing when to sit or stand, what to say, when a certain prayer or hymn will happen, some churches function on a simpler system which alternates song with sermon, and intersperses prayer in a natural way. Some of the laity in these churches would not even know the definition of "liturgy" because their worship flows so naturally and seems so casual in its construction.

Though there will always be people who believe their worship preference is the only correct method, the United Methodist Church officially keeps an open mind and loose regulations on liturgy. Just as John Wesley recognized the value in both traditionally formal worship and free informal worship, denominational leaders see that either form can be valid and useful, and leave it to individual pastors to determine what most benefits their congregations.

My Personal Worship Journey

I was raised as a Missouri Synod Lutheran, attending church regularly with my mother, and my father and sister are Roman Catholic. Most people have some concept of how formal and traditional most Catholic worship services are, they are, after all, the original definition of the “tradition.” To explain my Lutheran roots: Lutherans are often considered very like Catholics, particularly in their worship practices; they are very conservative. The Missouri Synod is the most conservative Lutheran order. The particular congregation and pastor I grew up with were among the most conservative of the Missouri Synod. I was bred and fed on set liturgy, hymns, reciting creeds, chanting, and somehow on the latent American belief that going to church is *what you do* come Sunday. I believe now that my parents attend church as worshippers, not as lemmings, but I did not understand that growing up. I saw only what they did, not comprehending what they felt.

When I went to college, I began attending various churches, many of them non-denominational. I also began to think about my faith, and wonder whether I was doing it justice. After a year of ups and downs in worship experiences, of great soul-searching, and of many life changes, I had a significant conversion experience. I changed from being a Christian in name and belief to being a Christian in action and heart. Immediately I began an informal and almost unconscious exploration of worship, in the interest of finding something authentic that I could feel a part of, in which I felt the greatest sense of connection to God.

At first, I attended mostly contemporary churches, reacting against my impression of my parents' churches. Since I had not found a personal connection to God in the traditional churches of my childhood, I assumed it was the fault of the worship there, that the old traditionalists were wrong in their methods and stunted spiritual growth with their solemnity. I saw clearly the real spiritual involvement of the evangelistic worshipers who felt so moved in song as to dance, who prayed spontaneously and with intensity, and whose pastors got so excited about their own sermons that they would shout from the pulpit, not as representatives of God's wrath, but as representatives of His grace who believed so heartily in its power that they couldn't be restrained.

In my work for a Christian organization only months after my conversion, I was required for two months to attend, of all things, a Catholic church. It was a Catholic church in the inner city of Wilmington, Delaware, in a primarily black neighborhood, and their worship followed the standard liturgy, but in a very lively manner. We sang to an organ, from hymnals, but there were new arrangements of some of the standard liturgical songs, and we sang energetically and clapped during them. We participated in the common "sharing of the peace", but instead of the awkward minute-and-a-half handshaking of those within easy reach which I have often observed, these men and women took a good ten minutes, in which nearly everyone left their pews in their enthusiasm to greet friends and neighbors, and real fellowship was to be seen. The sermons were relatively brief, beginning with a Bible passage but soon veering off into a topical rather than exegetical coverage. Prayers were read from a form, both those of the pastor and of the congregation together.

It was largely my time at this Catholic church in Wilmington which convinced me of the validity of traditional worship. I believe I needed to see some outer expressions of intense involvement in worship within a conservative setting before I could learn to see the inner connection in the quieter services at home. Before, it had seemed to me that the conservative people at home were experiencing nothing much spiritually, and many of their actions seemed to be nothing more than attempts to live a good life. My co-workers were often confused by the Catholic liturgy, and didn't know how to navigate the bulletin, missal, and hymnal, much less call out the responses that were not written but simply known. I missed a few things, but could find my way well enough to feel like a true participant in the worship. When I came home again and visited my old conservative church, I was able to see true worship in the actions I had thought were dead ritual. Yet there were also things I realized were based on a theology that reached beyond what I recognize as Biblical. And there were parts of their worship that I knew were done in earnest, but which didn't reach me at all.

Interestingly, the same organization with which I attended a Catholic host church on Sunday mornings also had its own worship meetings Sunday evenings, which were almost on the other end of the spectrum in some aspects. They were inter-denominational celebrations in which the singing was exuberant and accompanied by dancing, kneeling, signing, and anything else we could come up with to do to express our feelings of being uplifted. At first these methods surprised me and intimidated me a little. But everyone else seemed so comfortable in what they were doing, that I was spurred on to try it. (They were not simply comfortable out of long habit of worshipping together; about half of us were new that summer.) I always had to close my eyes to keep

from feeling self-conscious, but I was soon able to let go of my traditional training and move freely. The environment was so trustful and supportive that even in the beginning, I didn't feel like I had to imitate others in anything but the vaguest forms; rather I was allowing my body to move in response to my feelings of worship, just as we allow our voices to in song and prayer. We sang a few hymns, but mostly modern praise songs, some original compositions of our worship leader, which were simple and based on one or two Bible verses. The sermons were short and simple, often from lay leaders, and we depended as much on testimonies from the group for inspiration. We were all attending other churches in the morning, however, and hoping to get our needs for deeper teaching filled there. Prayer was intense and personal, we prayed for ourselves and our group, for the city and the people we served, and for the poor and needy in general, but not really for other national or world issues. There was a good deal of thanks in our prayers for the support that made our work possible and for the effect we were able to have in the city. In many ways, our Sunday evening worship was the equivalent to Wesley's Society meetings: those who had something in common met together in informal but intense worship as a supplement to regular church attendance.

In the years since that time, I've lost count of the number of churches I've attended in my personal and academic exploration of worship. I have found equally moving experiences in contemporary and conservative churches and practices. Hymns and praise songs alike bring tears to my eyes at times. Sermons offer me meaningful instruction and inspiration whether spoken solemnly or shouted. Prayers can touch me by their heartfelt personal nature or by their facilitation of communion among the church

universal. I would love to find a church that combines all these positives, but it is unlikely that I will in this lifetime.

There are dangers inherent in approaching either extreme on the worship continuum. The congregation of a traditional church knows the traditions through long exposure, and they seem so evident, that the congregation forgets there are those who need help to understand. The newcomer is met with a barrage of rituals he cannot enter into because he doesn't know how to act them out, and he doesn't know what they mean. The anxiousness of approaching something unfamiliar is present in either type of service, but can be more potent in a traditional service because of the formality and emphasis on ritual as opposed to the more casual feeling of a contemporary service. There is some element of discomfort for many people in encountering anything unfamiliar, and a worship service has several elements that make it especially difficult. First, the newcomer knows that most of the other people there know what to do when he does not; they are familiar with the service, but often unknown to him, they may or may not choose to help him. Second, worship is an act of particular intimacy, in which his deepest feelings can be opened up, which makes him vulnerable. One student had this to say after attending two differing services with me, one traditional, one contemporary: "At the beginning of both services I felt a little nervous, but loosened up as the services progressed. At the traditional service I felt nervous when I entered the building, because I didn't know what to expect. When I entered the contemporary building, I was not 'nervous' until I entered the sanctuary," (MKS). The visitor to a traditional church is also faced with the possibility of that they might not be accepted by some due to their appearance. Though most conservative churches I have attended will not scruple to

disdain a visitor wearing jeans, even if the regular congregation is in suits and dresses, there are some which will, feeling the unorthodox dress to be an affront to respectability, and some individual members may unconsciously give strange looks at someone who looks different.

Another aspect of danger in a traditional service is in the instruction of children about the rituals. I encountered a problem understanding the rituals myself, as a child, even though in our church they were technically explained in early adolescence. I understood that we did certain things to express certain aspects of our relationship to God, but did not comprehend the spiritual or emotional connection, only the bare symbolism. Children in the traditional church will know the rituals as well as their parents, but the parents must be careful to teach the children the significance behind them. Otherwise the youth will be mere placeholders in the pews, mouthing the words, until reaching an age of independence or rebellion, at which time they may leave the pews for good, with a distorted view of religion and of God.

In music, the conservative church again has familiarity to watch out for. Many classic hymns are still sung and enjoyed today, particularly during holiday seasons, when people enjoy the celebration of tradition. This week at High Street United Methodist Church, for an advent service, 8 hymns were used (some sung, some played by an orchestra), none of which had been written later than 1868, and several of which were so old as to have no distinguishable origin, noted as “Traditional French” or “German”. The secret of using classic hymns, however, is in using those that are still comprehensible to the modern Christian. Churches must beware of the songs which are known to them but will baffle the visitor or young person. They must also beware of songs to which the

lyrics are known, but not understood. We must beware of making beautiful music rather than offering God our worship. Just as John Wesley was opposed to choirboys singing what they did not understand, wanting the congregation to enact its own worship with comprehension, we must be certain, now that the congregation sings for itself, that it understands what it sings (Davies 33). In old hymns also is the danger of encountering outmoded theology. When hymns were first introduced, they expressed the theology of the church through two functions: as creeds for the people to state what they believe, and as teaching devices to show the people what they ought to believe. Though the theology of Methodism has largely remained constant since the old hymns were written, there are certain ideas which have come up in different sectors that were later discarded or shown to be flawed, but which may remain in the hymns written in that time. One must be particularly careful in reviving classic hymns that were previously “lost” for a time; there may be a good reason they were left behind.

In prayer as well the comprehension and participation of the congregation are vital. One way in which the congregation is made to feel participant in the set prayers used by some traditional churches is in the knowledge that the same set prayers are known to be used by others in the same denomination, offering a connection with a larger body. Even some of those who dislike the feel of set prayers recognize the value of using them to unify first the congregation within the local church, and also the larger group. That recognition can be seen in this comment from a fellow student after she attended a traditional service: “The reading of prayers seemed a bit dry to me; it seems prayer should come from the heart. However, the written out passages serve to unify the group,” (RKB). The prayers she referred to were set prayers that the congregation read aloud in

unison. For Methodists in particular, the sense of connection to the larger denomination has been historically important, because of the days when because most of the preachers were the itinerants, there was no regular service in a given town which prevented any real sense of even the local congregation. The idea of the itinerancy, along with the quarterly conferences, however, strengthened the sense of connection to the larger body of Methodists (Norwood 364).

Since the Protestant Reformation churches broke from the tradition of hearing mass in Latin and put the liturgy into the common tongues of the people, it has been expected that the congregation will benefit from understanding the words of the prayers. The difference is observable even in the terminology; Catholics called their attendance at church “hearing” mass, as they did not enact it themselves. Latin had been used because it was considered to be more civilized, more suitable for use in a sacred setting. The Catholic Church of the sixteenth century, which they were protesting against, considered mass something the priests performed and the congregation watched, while offering their own silent prayers. Some churches even had “screens” of wood or iron between the sanctuary (the front part of the church where the priest stands) and the nave (the pews) which almost completely obscured the view. (Vestiges of these can be seen in some nineteenth century Anglican churches which have partial screens of open ironwork, which can be seen through easily.) Protestants wished for the people to be able to worship for themselves, however. The Protestants esteemed the used of the “vulgar” tongues because they allowed the congregation to understand and participate in, not just “hear”, the worship service. Today, however, some churches use archaic words in their prayers out of a sense that they are more sacred or traditional, more suitable for use in our

speech to God. This is the same fallacious line of reasoning used by the Reformation-era Catholics, though the practice that follows from it is not so severe. Though some of the people who attend churches which use older words in their prayers than in their normal speech still know the meanings of these words or have been taught them for the purpose of using them in church, it cannot be denied that many members and visitors alike simply do not understand them. This prevents their participation in the prayer, distracts them, and may make them feel uncomfortably inferior.

Likewise, contemporary churches must be careful in their use of prayer.

Extemporaneous prayer opens up the possibility of carelessness in prayer from which we are safe with set forms. Certain phrases come into popular use from time to time, which become filler in between phrases and when the speaker doesn't know what to say next.

Several years ago, I knew numerous individuals who I referred to as having "Father God syndrome" because their prayers were so heavily sated with that particular address.

There is nothing wrong with addressing God in such a way, even numerous times, but when the words are thrown out without thought, they are less valuable, and other phrases used in the same way could even be dangerous. Excessive repetition, when noted by the hearers, also becomes humorous, particularly in the case of a friend who displayed his "Father God syndrome" often when praying with a group of elementary school children, who are less apt to conceal their amusement than adults. It is also easy, in extemporaneous prayer, to get caught up in the flow of words and to speak faster than one thinks, which can have disastrous, or at least embarrassing, results. We ought to remember that when we pray in front of a church, we are praying on behalf of the congregation to God. It is part of the transaction of worship performed by the leaders of the church, and as such

those offering public prayers should be cautious to maintain a sense of respect for the congregation they represent and the God they address (Davies 196).

In their music, contemporary churches have opposite dangers to fear than those of traditional churches. Instead of senseless traditionalism, the danger for contemporary music is of valuing novelty or popularity over appropriateness, both in form and lyrics. In both cases the leaders can be fooled by the idea that they are providing what the people (the regular congregation) want. Their position of responsibility, however, requires that they value what is beneficial to the congregation more than what is desired. The popularity of some modern worship songs also creates the danger of familiarity. One fellow student wondered, after attending a contemporary service in which praise songs took a leading role, whether people thought about what the words meant, or just sang along thoughtlessly with these popular tunes. The actual musicians leading worship also face dangers, in that they must be careful to avoid getting caught up in the emotion and power of the music, and thus leading the congregation to, instead of focusing on the spiritual power present in their worship. Music has undeniable emotional power that is both valuable and dangerous in worship. Particularly the use of repetition in contemporary praise songs can lead to problems, as the words can lose their verbal significance and become mere musical phrases. For some, it is true, we repeat the words because of their meaning, because we want to say those powerful words again, but not all people react this way, and not all will have this same reaction to the same phrases. John Wesley, as the Methodists made a change from psalm settings to hymns, worried about getting caught up in emotion of singing – as we do now, singing in one popular praise

song, "I'm coming back to the heart of worship/where it's all about you/it's all about you Jesus".

On the whole, leaders of contemporary services are in danger of the very emphasis on emotion and experience which was part of the original appeal and uniqueness of Methodism. Both are important parts of worship, but they are just that, parts. Scriptural wisdom must offer our primary guidance in worship, rather than how we feel, as our human emotions are so vulnerable. And there is a danger in relying on experiential religion. Who can say, but the man who feels it, what tugs at his soul? Is it God, Satan, or some human agenda? Was it his soul which was affected, or only the heart or mind? Many of us occasionally find it hard to distinguish these things for ourselves, and most would not choose to determine them for another. We must beware of our worship becoming sensual rather than spiritual (Norwood 230).

Both contemporary and traditional pastors face the same challenges in preparing sermons. They must remember to preach the Gospel, the Word of God, not just the ethical or philosophical ideas which humans have extrapolated from it. I have often heard much more novel and striking ideas when a pastor has offered a direct exegesis of a passage of Scripture than when topical sermons are given, centered around a human idea to which were fit a few scattered verses. A special challenge to pastors is the mix of people in the congregation, young and old, non-Christians and Christians new and old, members and visitors. One simplification can be made in offering alternate worship for children and youth during the sermon or the whole service. But in one sermon, the pastor must address all of the other groups together. He must find a balance between offering the basics of the Gospel message and advanced theology.

In both traditional and contemporary churches, in all aspects of worship, the basic formula is to consider the audience, and focus on authentic spirituality. Responses to worship from fellow students have shown that people enjoy worship more and feel more involved where they feel comfortable. They are also sensitive to people leading worship who are not authentic in their expressions (JEM). To lead effectively in worship, the leader must be truly worshipping as well (RKB).

Interestingly, the more I look at the conflicts between traditional and contemporary churches today, the more similarities I see to the conflicts between Methodism and Anglicanism almost three centuries ago. The radical has become the establishment, and again, some worshipers are rebelling against, some clinging to, the old styles. In my opinion, either form of worship is valid, so I would advise the modern Christian to go where you feel comfortable. Check the practices against scripture, of course, for the appropriateness of the practices, but please, check them against your own heart as well. You were made to worship God, and your instincts will reveal this worship in your heart when it is real. God has given you a “conscience”, the guiding of the Holy Spirit, for a reason, use that to guide yourself in finding a place of true worship for you. John Wesley recognized this need for the heart to be involved in worship, which caused him to allow Methodist churches in his day the freedom to choose their own practices, which tradition has continued until the present day. No matter how connected or involved another person may feel to the worship in any particular place, if you feel blocked or distracted from worshipping, this is not productive. You may have meaningless or exaggerated stereotypes to overcome. Watch out for these. Overcoming them can expand your worship horizons and intensify your experience. However, even

once we have gotten beyond these stereotypes, each of us still has a preference, a manner of worship that feels more comfortable (whether it is because it's "homey" (what we grew up with) or simply a personal preference), and there is nothing wrong with feeling comfortable when you worship! Nowhere in the Bible does God demand our discomfort in worship! It instructs us to worship in the context of positive feelings and spiritual freedom, as seen in Psalm 95. Whatever any person tries to tell us about worship, no one can pretend to know more about it than our Creator God, the one whom we worship.

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Appendix: Worship Journey

On October 13, 2002, three students accompanied me to two contrasting worship services, a traditional service at College Avenue United Methodist Church and a contemporary service at Union Chapel United Methodist Church. Given questions to answer regarding their experiences, they each submitted a written response. Following are the questions, their responses, and the researcher's comments after reviewing them.

Answer any questions which interest you, please try to give some comment on at least 3 or 4.

(1) Did you feel comfortable choosing your own posture of worship? (Not just during songs, but at any time during the service, i.e. kneeling or lifting your hands, bowing to pray.) Did you ever chose a certain posture just because it was what everyone else seemed to be doing?

(2) Did you feel like you had to watch everybody else to know what to do? Was this uncomfortable at all? Did it distract you from worshipping God?

(3) Where did you feel a more intimate or personal connection to God? Why do you think you felt that?

(4) Where did you feel more like a part of a group? Why?

(5) Where did you feel a stronger sense of worship? Why?

(6) Did you ever close your eyes (other than when the congregation was praying)? Why?

(7) Were both sermons Biblically based? How were they different?

(8) Do you have any other comments on the sermons?

(9) How closely did the service pertain to the Bible readings? (Were there any given outside the sermon?)

(10) Did you notice anything in particular about prayer during the service?

(11) Did you feel involved in the prayers?

General comments:

- at the beginning of both services I felt a little nervous, but loosened up as the services progressed. At the traditional service I felt nervous when I entered the building, because I didn't know what to expect. When I entered the contemporary building, I was not "nervous" until I entered the sanctuary.

Contemporary (Union Chapel)

- I did not enjoy the sermon at the contemporary service. I felt like the preacher was just saying good things that would be applicable to some kind of training workshop rather than explaining what God's message (the Bible) was. The scriptures quoted were not always accurately explained.

- I did not feel connected, although I felt that many others in the room were having a good sense of connection with each other and the pastor. I did enjoy the fact that the entire congregation held hands - even across the aisles during prayer - this made me feel unified with the others in the congregation, as one people, under God. Like we were a family.

- I felt a sense of commercialism with the well-done pamphlets, videos, and advertising posters on the walls of the church. I found the church somewhat of a live stereotype of a middle-classed white church whose good looking walls matched people's plastic smiles,

where light, frivolous phrases about "We're here to praise the LORD" introduced repetitive, light-hearted songs with little content. Had the resources (pamphlets, videos, etc.) been appropriately addressed with sincerity and a sense of deep purpose, perhaps I would not have perceived the church as "commercialized".

I also sensed that people were trying to be perky and in a good mood which came off to me as somewhat artificial and forced. I especially found this true of the worship leader. I felt like he thought he needed to "perform", like that was his job as worship leader (specifically have a face wrinkled up in concentration in order to show everyone He was deeply connecting with God so they would too) as his job, which is disappointing to me, since I think that if He just worships God himself, others will follow. He didn't totally seem this way, just a bit. He also didn't seem totally comfortable up there to me, which caused me to lead myself into worship of God, rather than following his lead.

Traditional (College Avenue)

- I enjoyed the traditional sermon. Although little scripture was used, it was clearly explained with examples from current times. I felt that I connected with the pastor, but that perhaps the others in the congregation (the older people) were perhaps not connecting with him or each other. I judged this by the feelings I had being present with the others in the congregation, and I also formed this opinion through looking at others around the room. I really enjoyed the fewer number of people and the physical closeness of people in the traditional congregation. I really felt welcome during the "greeting

moment" where regular attenders smiled and shook hands with me - they seemed to genuinely be glad I was there!

- At the traditional service, I enjoyed the hymns, but because they were unfamiliar, I had a hard time worshipping God through them - I kept focusing on getting the tune and words right. I did not feel a sense of connection with God as we prayed the Lord's prayer, but did connect with Him while listening to the pastor and others leading the service pray aloud individually.

- I felt that in trying to "get down" the order of everything - when to sit, stand, sing, what to sing, where to find the hymn in the book, etc., took my focus off God and onto the routine of church. I tried to throw this off, but it was difficult because I did want to follow along.

- I really appreciated the man who did the announcements - he seemed sincere.

- People seemed to use more formal speech and actions here than they would if you saw them out in the community. Because of the formal atmosphere this caused, a formal rather than informal atmosphere, I felt as if I could not connect with God in the usual way that I do. I felt like my experience was restricted, somewhat, especially during the worship time.

Specific Q's

4. I felt more part of a group at the contemporary service because the people there were more like me - closer to my age, dressed like me, worshipped God through singing in a similar way as to what I enjoy. I also felt that the structure/set-up of the room made me feel more part of a group here than at the traditional church. Specifically, having a wide room, carpeted, a lower ceiling with much artificial light, and chairs rather than pews made me feel at home and part of a group with fellow people in the congregation. The high ceiling, pews, and more natural lighting (was there tile rather than carpet? I think so) made me feel less part of group - I felt individual.

5. I felt an equal sense of worship in both settings, though the sense of worship was less than what I usually feel at my home church. Different aspects of each church restricted my sense of worship (see above comments) at least somewhat. I felt stronger content at the traditional service, but more freedom to express myself at the contemporary service.

2. Yes, I had to watch everyone to know what to do at both services, but much more at the traditional service. This did hinder my experience (see above comments).

MKS

1. I did not exactly feel 'uncomfortable' choosing my own posture (kneeling, sitting, etc.), however, at neither Union Chapel nor College Ave. did I feel exactly 'comfortable' choosing my own posture. Particularly at College Ave., part of the "order of worship" itself is the fact that the congregation stands as a whole. Besides, they don't force you to stand for half an hour while singing song after song like Muncie Alliance does. ;) And yes, I did choose my posture based upon that of those around me at both Union Chapel and College Ave.

2. No, I did not feel like I had to watch everybody else to know what to do; no, this was NOT uncomfortable; and no, it did not distract me from worshipping God (good job on correctly spelling "worshipping" in the questionnaire, too).

3. I felt a more intimate/personal connection to God at College Ave. than Union Chapel. There was more of a feel of connection to the congregation and to God at College Ave.; however, at least part of this is due to the fact that College Ave.'s service that we attended was the service that I prefer. It's easier to feel connected to a church where the style of worship aligns with your own, after all.

4. Again, I felt more like a part of the group at College Ave., due to the reasons that I gave in #3.

5. Again, College Ave. The style of worship was my preferred style, which I

feel (personal opinion) that people do when they are more serious about worshipping God instead of being entertained (which is a common perception--correct or no--I have about "contemporary" worship services). This goes back to my belief (perception, stereotype, etc.) that contemporary churches are populated by spiritually shallow people that only desire an emotional 'fix' and not a life of committed discipleship.

6. I DID actually close my eyes at one point at College Ave. It was when we were preparing to sing "Come, Christians, Join to Sing," but only the organ was playing. It was my way of quieting myself to worship God more wholeheartedly.

7. Both sermons were Biblically based; however, College Ave. was more expository, whereas Union Chapel was more topical. I cannot tell if that is the normal thing at College Ave., however, because Rev. Saunders is not the usual speaker there.

8. Union Chapel had more of a public speaking style about it, a pep talk or the like; it certainly wasn't an exposition, even if it was based off of a Biblical text.

9. There were no outside Bible readings at Union Chapel or College Ave.; both had a close relation to the sermon itself, but a loose relation to the service as a whole.

10. Prayer was more liturgical at College Ave., whereas at Union Chapel it was more ex tempore (not planned).

11. Yes, I did feel involved in the prayers.

Note: Just in case you wanted to still use my notes on my stereotypes of traditional and contemporary churches, here they are again.

Traditional churches are populated mostly by people that are spiritually dead.

Contemporary churches are populated mostly by people that are spiritually shallow.

--JEM

COLLEGE AVENUE

The College Avenue service I suppose was more “formal” but after having been to both the Union service and College Avenue, I didn’t see how the “formality” detracted at all from my experience with God there. I suppose that is because both services were “formal” in that they followed a set order.

The music at CA was varied, unlike the multiple songs sung in Union Chapel. Hymns are very structured in format, following meter and harmonic cadences strictly. The organ prelude’s ‘churchy’ feel helped connect me to those that love organ music; I’ve never really loved organ music, especially not in church, but I could tell those around me liked it, and so I enjoyed the jovial atmosphere. The offertory music was high quality. The church brought in some resident music majors from BSU for ‘Panis Angelicus’, and the technical skill was great. The piece was fairly difficult but not showy, and modulations of tonal area, varied melodic development, and dynamic contrast made the piece stimulating, and gave room for a lot of expression. Funny thing is, though, since I know of the personal beliefs of the two performers, I doubt that they believed what they were singing/playing; in fact, it was more of a job or a performance than an expression of inward conviction, and I couldn’t help but thinking as the ushers passed the offering basket: “We are paying for our entertainment here.” A shame when \$\$ should be given to missions or to the poor.

Prayer at CA solidified a moment in time; sentences were longer, more flowery; a standing still sensation. I noticed there was no mention of the words “sin” or “blood of the Lamb” but instead of “peace,” “love,” and other unobtrusive words. The reading of

prayers seemed a bit dry to me; it seems prayer should come from the heart. However, the written out passages serve to unify the group. Hopefully they *were* unified. I tend to think though that when a passage is read together in unison that the congregation member is thinking too much about how his/her voice sticks out than the meaning of the words.

The scripture reading at CA targeted a specific passage in preparation for the sermon. (At Union Chapel this was not at all the case. There was no scripture reading in this sense of the word). The reverend chose about 12 verses of scripture on which to expound.

I enjoyed the sermon that Rev. Saunders gave that morning. The central message, that of going outside the box, and obeying the Spirit instead of working oneself silly trying to make things happen, was not one I had expected to hear at a more traditional service. I would have expected to hear a sermon praising the sacrifices of the disciples, apostles, or missionaries of today; and some sort of guilt trip about not doing the Lord's work. I guess I should always allow room to be surprised! His points were well taken, and I felt he spoke from personal experience.

Rev. Saunders included many examples from his own life to demonstrate the message. The sermon referred to Paul's experience in Acts 16 but concentrated on personal life experience more than teaching on Paul's experience, searching out the original context of scripture. But I felt it was still relevant.

UNION CHAPEL

After meditating in the CA atmosphere, segmented worship, programmed readings, hymns, etc., Union Chapel's large crowd (rather noisy in comparison), continuous worship segment, song after song in the same genre, etc., provided an outlet for those aspects not fulfilled in the first service.

Words projected on the screens up front were simple, more intimate sounding than hymn lyrics. I hope that this increased simplicity allowed for more focus and meditation. But not necessarily so. I wondered whether most congregation members really meant what they were saying or whether they sung by rote many of these common and popular songs. So the issue of corporate worship being valid or not was about the same in each service. As far as my personal worship was concerned, I found that it was easier for me to get in some of my own personal prayer during the 2nd or 3rd repeat of the songs, so that was good. But it would have been nice to have sung songs with "meatier" lyrics (like hymn lyrics).

Prayer at Union seemed to move ahead, its shorter and almost frenzied phrases brought a sense of urgency, and the Almighty was addressed in intimate terms. Prayer seemed much more impromptu, less refined. Whereas prayers at CA seemed like an ice sculpture, prayers at Union Chapel were an ironwork being pounded out by the blacksmith. I don't know which I preferred.

There were a lot of announcements; maybe this took over the 'scripture reading' segment (I don't recall a formal scripture reading at union). Although Union might be considered "less formal", it was most certainly not less formal in the category of

announcements. Oh my. Multimedia messages announcing need for volunteers to drive buses. A drawn out announcement asking help with ushering, etc. I couldn't help but feel these really took away from our corporate worship. Also, it seems the nature of the announcements was really self-serving (one of the reasons given for becoming an usher was that people decide whether they will attend a certain church within the first 5 minutes, therefore ushers increase Union church population (which increases income). Gag me.)

The sermon was definitely different in style from College Avenue; topical instead of passage-based, and though maybe it wasn't as solid a sermon, it spoke to me personally, and I left feeling a bit more encouraged to encourage others.

Overall, then, both services had something to offer. College Avenue was supposedly more formal, but I felt that Union chapel could have used a bit more freedom. Though it is part of a movement that said "Hey, let's forget about the program, and just do what the Spirit wants us to do," it had the thicker of the two programs. At Union I felt able to get in more personal prayer time, though. I'm not sure where I felt more part of a group. Probably at College Avenue (because the segmented nature of the program highlighted corporate congregational worship) I felt more part of a group, but I was able to get more individual worship done at Union, which in turn made me feel closer to the group of people worshipping as I was.

RKB

My Comments:

Perceptions were affected by the choice of a small intimate traditional service and a large “commercial” contemporary service.

I was surprised but very happy to see so many enjoying and feeling “into” the traditional service! This is contrary to much of my previous experience in traditional services with others my age, as well as my own personal experience.

What is appreciated by all of these people is *sincerity*, above all else. This is conveniently Biblical – idea of instinct, conscience.